Pickle in the Middle

- by Eric Schempp

I was attempting to create a typical Russian salad called Olivea. It is not all that difficult to make. It is just a bunch of different vegetables held together by mayonnaise but it is surprisingly good. I opened up my refrigerator to compare what the recipe called for and what I had that wasn't moldy. It just so happened that the recipe required pickles and I didn't have any. So, I made the two-minute walk to the store to get some.

I walked in and waited in line. Every single product in most Russian stores is behind a counter and you have to specifically request what you want. Eventually, I made it to the counter and informed the clerk that I wanted some salted cucumbers. In the Russian language, pickles are just simply salted cucumbers. The clerk asked me how much I wanted and I debated this long and hard. I couldn't decide between one and two jars but then figured one should suffice. I told the clerk and watched as she went to the back to get my pickles.

After a few minutes she returned, but there was something wrong. She was only holding one pickle. She neatly wrapped it in saran wrap, weighed it, plugged it into her calculator, played with her abacus for a bit, and eventually was able to determine how much I owed. She wrote the amount down on a piece of paper and handed it to me. Everything happened so quickly that I didn't have time to object and say that I wanted one jar not just one pickle. But at this point it was too late. Anyway, I would have felt badly if I made her unwrap the neatly saran wrapped pickle and return the lone pickle back to its family.

So, I took the piece of paper with the amount I owed written on it to the cash register at the front of the store, paid my three rubles, got a receipt, and returned to the counter where my saran wrapped pickled was conveniently waiting for me. The clerk looked at my receipt, ripped it, and handed me my pickle.

Carrying my pickle and completely embarrassed, I made my way to another store to get an entire jar.